

**Capsule Summary**  
**CH-562**  
**Bel Alton High School**  
**9501 Crain Highway**  
**Bel Alton, Maryland**  
**Circa 1937**  
**Private**

Constructed circa 1937, the Bel Alton High School was the first public high school for African-American students in Charles County and was one of only two African-American high schools operating in the county in the second quarter of the twentieth century. The Charles County Board of Education purchased the property on which the school sits as five separate parcels of land. The assembled property on Crain Highway (MD 301) eventually held a high school, an elementary school, and associated outbuildings, including an auditorium, a freestanding gymnasium, and an agricultural building, a grouping of buildings indicative of P.W.A. schools constructed in the second quarter of the twentieth century. The Bel Alton High School, constructed circa 1937, opened for its first academic year in 1938. The high school operated from 1938 until 1965, when Charles County integrated its school system.

The Bel Alton High School is located at the crossroads of MD 301 and Irving Road in Bel Alton, Charles County. Designated as 9501 Crain Highway, county tax records indicate the property is also associated with the address 9505 Crain Highway. This one-story, eleven-bay school building is designed in the Colonial Revival style. The building is concrete-block construction clad in stucco. The main block of the school building is one story in height and five bays in width. Covered by a side gable roof clad in asphalt shingles, the main block also features two projecting front-gabled bays. The side gable

roof has triangular louvered vents in the gable ends. Two chimneys are located on the main block. The interior chimney is stretcher-bond brick construction with arched hoods. An exterior-side shouldered chimney constructed of 6:1 American-bond brick is located on the rear (west) elevation. A one-story, two-bay flat-roofed wing is located on the north elevation of the main block. A front-gabled auditorium wing comprises the northernmost section of the school building. To the south of the main block is a two-story, one-bay flat-roofed wing. A two-story addition with a flat roof is located along the southern elevation of the school's south wing. The addition has a one-story, shed-roofed projection. Furthermore, the school has a one-story addition on the rear elevation. Additions to the school were constructed circa 1948 to meet the needs of the growing student population. To the rear of the school are four associated freestanding buildings: a former annex to the high school/elementary school, an agricultural building/gymnasium, a concrete-block pump station, and a prefabricated shed. The level grassy lot has gravel and paved driveways as well as scattered mature trees and shrubs. Overgrown vegetation surrounds the site.

# Maryland Historical Trust

## Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. CH-562

### 1. Name of Property

historic Bel Alton High School

other

### 2. Location

street and number 9501 Crain Highway not for publication

city, town Bel Alton vicinity

county Charles

### 3. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name County Commissioners of Charles County

street and number PO Box 2150 telephone

city, town Bel Alton state Maryland zip code 20646-0167

### 4. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Charles County Courthouse liber 1529 folio 526

city, town LaPlata tax map 64 tax parcel 74 tax ID number 04-009908

### 5. Primary Location of Additional Data

- \_\_\_\_\_ Contributing Resource in National Register District
- \_\_\_\_\_ Contributing Resource in Local Historic District
- \_\_\_\_\_ Determined Eligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
- \_\_\_\_\_ Determined Ineligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
- \_\_\_\_\_ Recorded by HABS/HAER
- \_\_\_\_\_ Historic Structure Report or Research Report at MHT
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### 6. Classification

Category	Ownership	Current Function		Resource Count	
_____ district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	_____ agriculture	_____ landscape	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	_____ private	_____ commerce/trade	_____ recreation/culture	3	2 buildings
_____ structure	_____ both	_____ defense	_____ religion	_____	_____ sites
_____ site		_____ domestic	_____ social	_____	_____ structures
_____ object		_____ education	_____ transportation	_____	_____ objects
		_____ funerary	_____ work in progress	3	2 Total
		_____ government	_____ unknown		
		_____ health care	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> vacant/not in use	Number of Contributing Resources	
		_____ industry	_____ other:	previously listed in the Inventory	
				4	

## 7. Description

Inventory No. CH-562

### Condition

<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> altered

Prepare both a one paragraph summary and a comprehensive description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

The Bel Alton High School, currently undergoing restoration and renovation to become a community development center under public-private partnership, is located at the crossroads of Crain Highway (MD 301) and Irving Road in Bel Alton, Charles County. Designated as 9501 Crain Highway, county tax records indicate the property is also associated with the address 9505 Crain Highway. The Bel Alton High School, constructed circa 1937, opened for its first academic year in 1938. This one-story, eleven-bay school building is designed in the Colonial Revival style. The building is concrete-block construction clad in stucco. The main block of the school building is one story in height and five bays in width. Covered by a side gable roof clad in asphalt shingles, the main block also features two projecting front-gabled bays. The side gable roof has triangular louvered vents in the gable ends. Two chimneys are located on the main block. The interior chimney is stretcher-bond brick construction with arched hoods. An exterior-side shouldered chimney constructed of 6:1 American-bond brick is located on the rear (west) elevation. A one-story, two-bay flat-roofed wing is located on the north elevation of the main block. A front-gabled auditorium wing comprises the northernmost section of the school building. To the south of the main block is a two-story, one-bay flat-roofed wing. A two-story addition with a flat roof is located along the southern elevation of the school's south wing. The addition has a one-story, shed-roofed projection. Furthermore, the school has a one-story addition on the rear elevation. Additions to the school were constructed circa 1948 to meet the needs of the growing student population. To the rear of the school are four associated freestanding buildings: a former annex to the high school/elementary school, an agricultural building/gymnasium, a concrete-block pump station, and a prefabricated shed. The level grassy lot has gravel and paved driveways as well as scattered mature trees and shrubs. Overgrown vegetation surrounds the site.

### Exterior Description:

The façade (east elevation) of the main block holds a double-leaf metal door with a 12-light wood transom. A one-story pedimented portico frames the main entrance. Paired Tuscan columns support the portico, which is enclosed by square metal balusters. A concrete ramp with square metal balusters extends south from the portico and leads to concrete sidewalk with a decorative pentagonal design. The entrance is flanked by ribbons of four 9/9 windows with lug sills that are clad in stucco. The bay north of the main entrance also has a 4/4 window with a stucco-clad lug sill. The projecting front-gabled bays on the main block have ribbons of five 9/9 windows with lug sills clad in stucco. The southern front-gabled bay also has a 4/4 window with a stucco-clad lug sill. A wood frieze board runs along the façade of the main block. The projecting front-gabled bays on the main block feature semi-circular louvered vents in the gable ends. The projecting bays also have raked cornices with returns. The one-story, two-bay wing located on the north elevation of the main block has two sets of paired 9/9 windows. The windows have rowlock sills clad in stucco. A flat roof with metal coping covers the wing.

Located north of the flat-roofed wing is the auditorium wing. The auditorium wing is three bays wide and one story in height; the auditorium is higher than the one-story wing to its south. The auditorium's main entrance holds double-leaf metal doors with a 3-light wood transom. A one-story, one-bay pedimented portico with Tuscan columns frames the entrance. A raised, arched brick surround with stucco infill encircles the façade

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entrance and portico. Paired 9/9 windows with 7-light wood transoms flank the auditorium entrance. The windows are set on rowlock sills clad in stucco. A louvered oculus vent is located in the gable end of the auditorium wing. The gable has a raked cornice and returns. The northern elevation of the auditorium wing features an off-centered double-leaf metal entry with a 2-light wood transom. One set of paired 9/9 windows are located to the east of the northern entrance and two sets of paired 9/9 windows are situated west of the entry. The windows have 7-light wood transoms and stucco-clad rowlock sills. A one-story, five-bay flat-roofed porch runs along the north elevation and wraps around the northwest corner of the auditorium wing. Metal posts support the porch. The northernmost bay projects well beyond the remainder of the rear (west) elevation. Unlike the façade, the west elevation of the auditorium wing has only two single windows on the north and south edges of the wing.

The 9/9 and 4/4 windows along the west elevation are grouped in ribbons of four and five and mirror the location of the window groupings on the façade (east elevation). The northernmost 4/4 window on the façade is mirrored with a 6/6 window on the west elevation. The windows sills on the west elevation, some of which are rowlock brick construction, are all clad in stucco. A double-leaf metal door with a 1-light transom is adjacent to the exterior-side chimney on the rear elevation of the main block. A wood frieze board runs along the rear elevation of the main block. The projecting gable-roofed bays on the west elevation have raked cornices with returns. A one-story, two-bay addition is located along the southernmost bays of the building's rear (west) elevation. The addition is concrete-block construction clad in stucco. A flat roof with metal coping covers the addition. Fenestration consists of three sets of tripled 6/6 vinyl-sash windows with lug sills, which are clad in stucco. A single-leaf metal door is located at the basement level of the addition. The entry to the addition is covered by a one-story, one-bay flat-roofed porch with metal posts.

The southern elevation of the school is obscured by a two-story, four-bay addition with a flat roof. The addition is concrete-block construction clad in stucco. The first story has a single-leaf metal door. A former stair was enclosed by the addition, but its form is still visible due to ghosting. The second story has 6/6 vinyl-sash windows with lug sills clad in stucco. The east bay of the addition is slightly higher than the rest of the addition and has a one-story shed roof projection on its south elevation. The shed-roofed addition has a single-leaf metal door on its west elevation and tripled 6/6 vinyl-sash windows with stucco-clad lug sills.

The facade of the two-story southernmost bay of the school has 6/6 vinyl-sash replacement windows with stucco-clad sills on the first story. A ribbon of four 9/9 windows is located on the second story. A flat roof with metal coping covers the southern bay of the school building.



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### Interior Description:

An auditorium is located in the northernmost bay of the school. Covered by a front-gabled roof, the auditorium has a drop ceiling with acoustical tiles. Currently under renovation, the auditorium has a concrete floor and no baseboards. Restoration plans call for finished floors and baseboards. A canted stage, flanked by stairs, is located along the western wall. Two small rooms are located at the top of the stairs behind the canted walls of the stage. The rise of the stage is clad in wainscoting. The walls are treated with painted drywall. Three pilasters are located on the north wall between the windows and two pilasters are located on both the east and west walls. A chair rail with an ogee-profile and crown molding encircle the auditorium. The room features paired 9/9 windows with 7-light wood transoms and two sets of exterior double-leaf metal doors.

The main corridor abuts the set of double-leaf interior metal doors leading to the auditorium. The corridor has a drop ceiling with acoustical tiles. The walls are painted drywall with rubber baseboards. Single-leaf wood classroom and office doors with lights and 6-light wood transoms run the length of both the east and west corridor walls. The doors have square-edged wood surrounds. The corridor has vinyl-tiled floors. A stair with metal rails is located where the two-story wing of the school begins. The stair is being renovated and currently has untreated wood treads. Double-leaf entrances to the building are located on both the east and west walls. Both entrances are located at the end of short side corridors. Each short corridor has multiple double-leaf doors. Two restrooms and a closet are located on the east wall, immediately south of the auditorium.

Classrooms of various sizes are located along the east and west walls of the main corridor. The classrooms all have drop ceilings with the same acoustical tiles found in the corridor and auditorium. The walls consist of painted drywall. Classroom floors are clad in either blue or white vinyl tile with rubber baseboards. Each classroom has either a four or five ribbon of 9/9 windows with square-edged wood surrounds. The windows have deep interior ledges.

The main office is located along the west wall of the main corridor, in line with the building's main entrance. Like the rest of the interior, the office has a drop ceiling with acoustical tiles. The office has painted drywall with rubber baseboards. The office floor is carpeted. A ribbon of 9/9 windows runs along the west wall of the room. A closet and an interior office are accessed through single-leaf doors on the north wall of this room.

Two rooms that will not be used as classroom space are located on the west elevation of the corridor. Both rooms have drop ceilings with acoustical tiles and painted drywall. The smaller room will be used as a conference room. The larger room has a molded wood baseboard, an ogee-profile chair rail, and crown molding below the drop ceiling. This larger room is known as the Heritage Room.

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A third room, located immediately south of the auditorium on the west wall of the corridor, is under renovation to become a kitchen. Both the concrete-block construction of the walls and the wood-frame construction of the rafters are exposed. A portion of the floor is missing.

### **Secondary Resources:**

#### **Jude House (former High School Annex and Elementary School):**

Constructed circa 1955 with a circa 1960 addition, the one-story, forty-two-bay building is concrete-block construction set on a solid foundation. A front-gabled roof clad in asphalt shingles covers the building. The gable ends are clad in vinyl siding. There is a slight height difference between the eastern and western wings of the building. The eastern wing was an annex to the Bel Alton High School that was built circa 1955. Constructed circa 1960, the western wing replaced the wood-frame elementary school located on the property and destroyed by fire. The western wing features an interior-side chimney of stretcher-bond brick construction with a concrete cap. Fenestration on both the north and south elevations consists of 1/1 vinyl-sash windows with lintel panels clad in vinyl siding. The building has a combination of rowlock and concrete lug sills. The south elevation features a double-leaf door with a lintel panel clad in vinyl siding. Five single-leaf metal doors are located along the north elevation of the building. The east elevation features a front-gabled porch framing a single-leaf metal door. The porch has metal posts and turned metal balusters. The interior of the Jude House was not accessed at the time of survey.

#### **Agricultural Building/Gymnasium:**

Constructed circa 1949, the one-story, two-bay agricultural building is concrete-block construction. A flat roof with metal coping covers the building. The façade (east elevation) features a roll-up, paneled wood door and a single-leaf entry. The single-leaf entry is boarded-up with plywood. The north and west elevations are not visible due to overgrown vegetation. A gymnasium constructed during the late 1960s is attached to the agricultural building via a one-story hyphen of concrete-block construction. A flat roof with metal coping covers the hyphen. The hyphen's façade is in line with the agricultural building, but the gymnasium's façade is set back. The hyphen has single-leaf doors on the east and south elevations. The gymnasium is two stories in height with one-story projections along the entire length of its façade (east) and rear (west) elevation. Including the hyphen, the gymnasium addition is twelve bays in width. The gymnasium has an exterior-side chimney of stretcher-bond brick construction. Fenestration consists of two roll-up doors, boarded-up single-leaf doors and windows, and 8-light wood casement windows with rowlock sills and dog-ear brick lintels. A one-story, six-bay flat-roofed porch is located on the facade of the gymnasium and is in line with the façade of the hyphen. Metal posts support the porch, which is L-shaped. The southern elevation features double-leaf wood doors on the first story and glass-block windows on the second story. The interior of the agricultural building/gymnasium was not accessed at the time of survey.

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### **Pump Station:**

A one-story, one-bay storage shed of concrete-block construction is located in the southwest corner of the property. The building has a gable roof clad in asphalt shingles and a plain fascia board. The northern gable end is clad in plywood. Two white storage tanks flank the shed. One tank is located along the west elevation of the shed and the other is along the shed's south elevation. Constructed circa 2006, the interior of the shed was not accessed at the time of survey.

### **Prefabricated Shed:**

A one-story, one-bay prefabricated shed, erected circa 1980, is located to the west of the former elementary school. The non-historic shed is clad in vinyl siding and covered by a gambrel roof. The interior of the shed was not accessed at the time of survey.



## 8. Significance

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Period	Areas of Significance	Check and justify below		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> health/medicine	<input type="checkbox"/> performing arts
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1999	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment/ recreation	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 2000-	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> ethnic heritage	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/ settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> social history
	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning		<input type="checkbox"/> maritime history	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation		<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other: _____

**Specific dates** 1937 - 1957

**Architect/Builder** Unknown

**Construction dates** 1937, 1948, 1949, 1955, 1960, 2006

Evaluation for:

☐ National Register

☐ Maryland Register

☒ not evaluated

Prepare a one-paragraph summary statement of significance addressing applicable criteria, followed by a narrative discussion of the history of the resource and its context. (For compliance projects, complete evaluation on a DOE Form – see manual.)

Constructed circa 1937, the Bel Alton High School was the first public high school for African-American students in Charles County and was one of only two African-American high schools operating in the county in the second quarter of the twentieth century. The Charles County Board of Education purchased the property on which the school sits as five separate parcels of land. The assembled property on Crain Highway (MD 301) eventually held a high school, an elementary school, and associated outbuildings, including an auditorium, a freestanding gymnasium, and an agricultural building, a grouping of buildings indicative of P.W.A. schools constructed in the second quarter of the twentieth century. The high school operated from 1938 until 1965, when Charles County integrated its school system. Bel Alton High School housed grades 9 through 11 from 1938 until 1950. In 1950, the school added grade 12. Thus, students who had completed grade 11 advanced to grade 12, and there was no graduating class in 1950. The County Commissioners of Charles County purchased the site from the Charles County Board of Education in 1991. The one-story building, located west of the Bel Alton High School and now known as the Jude House, is currently being used as a rehabilitation center. The high school is undergoing an exterior restoration and an interior renovation made possible by a public-private venture in order to convert the property into a community development center.

### Historic Context:

Created by an Order in Council in 1658, Charles County was home to Maryland's second largest seaport, Port Tobacco. Founded in 1634 and settled on the site of the Potopaco Indian village, Port Tobacco was such a large port it was listed on early world maps. At the time, tobacco was the primary export crop in Charles County. Tobacco is a labor-intensive crop that created a high level of dependence on slaves in Charles County as well as in neighboring counties during the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

Like many counties in Maryland, Charles County experienced an occupational shift from farming to other trades and industry prior to and after the Civil War (1861-1865). The silt build-up in the river and port at Port Tobacco during this period made access increasingly impossible, which lead to new centers of commerce in the

<sup>1</sup> MD 301 Historic Context Report, EHT Tracerics, December 1998.

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county. The shift from tobacco farming to trades and industry accelerated further with the establishment of the railroad in La Plata, three miles east of Port Tobacco.<sup>2</sup>

With the arrival of the railroad in La Plata in 1869, the Chapman and Stone families ceded rights of way for the laying of the tracks. The resulting town took its name from the Chapman's "La Plata Farm." Rail service began in 1873, which was the same year the first post office was established. In 1895, with the continued decline of Port Tobacco's role as a major seaport coupled with the burning of the county courthouse, the county seat was moved from Port Tobacco to La Plata.<sup>3</sup> As county seat, La Plata experienced increased industrialization, population growth, and demographic changes. According to the Federal census, the population of Charles County in 1870 was 15,191. Of these 15,191 residents, almost 10,000 were classified as non-Caucasian. By 1880, both the total population increased to 18,548 and the non-Caucasian population topped 10,000. It was not until 1920 that Caucasians in Charles County outnumbered the non-Caucasian population by approximately 1,000 people.<sup>4</sup>

During this period of political and social change after the Civil War, newly freed African Americans bonded together in close-knit communities tied together by social support networks such as churches, schools, and fraternal/social associations. The education of former slaves and their children became an important element of these early African-American communities. Philanthropic organizations and the Freedmen's Bureau often assisted in the establishment of elementary and technical schools by providing funds and materials for the construction of buildings. These buildings often served as churches as well as schools, and functioned as focal points for growing African-American communities. Beginning in 1917, the Rosenwald Fund was one of the primary sources of financial assistance for African-American communities nationwide that sought to build their own schools. Often, the construction of churches and schools occurred on lands tenanted or granted to African-American farmers by white landowners.

While the Rosenwald School Fund had both a drastic and positive impact on schools for African Americans in the South, the initiative was discontinued in 1932 just prior to the construction of the Bel Alton High School. During the Great Depression, there was a lull in construction of school buildings throughout the United States. Yet, between 1934 and 1938, the Public Works Administration (P.W.A.) made grants and loans for school building amounting to \$113,155,766 per year. During this period, 1,965 school buildings were constructed throughout the Continental United States. Nearly two-thirds of these schools were erected in suburban and rural areas like Bel Alton and La Plata. The advent of improved roads and school buses spurred the consolidation of schools into large-scale districts across the country during the first two decades of the twentieth century while aid received from the P.W.A. also improved the types of educational facilities that were erected. The new

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.vistitcharlescounty.com/sites.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.visitcharlescounty.com/cities1.htm#laplat>

<sup>4</sup> MD 301 Historic Context Report, EHT Tracerics, December 1998.

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schools provided classroom space for subjects such as science, art, music, and workshop. The facilities often included auditoriums and/or gymnasiums and libraries.<sup>5</sup> Indicative of P.W.A. schools, the Bel Alton High School had an auditorium, a freestanding gymnasium, and an agricultural building.

Although the non-Caucasian population outnumbered the Caucasian population until 1920, Charles County did not have a public African-American high school until 1937. Pomonkey High School, the first private African-American high school in the county, opened in 1922. Local educator Alice Freeman (Young) recalled during an oral history that Pomonkey High School was the first African-American high school in the area, which included both Charles and St. Mary's counties; however, Pomonkey was only an option for those students who could afford the tuition. Joshua Lodge from the Order of Good Samaritans donated land for the school building. The two-story, wood-frame school operated until 1969.<sup>6</sup>

Land acquisition for the construction of a public high school in La Plata for African-American students occurred over a thirty-year period. The County Board of Education of Charles County began to buy land in the early 1920s. In 1923, the board purchased a parcel of land from Lucy A. and Thomas R. Gardiner, owners of a local farm. After construction had begun on the school building, the Board of Education was able to acquire a second parcel of land from James Neal and Mary E. Hamilton in 1938. The Hamiltons also owned and operated a farm. In the same year, 1938, both Paul and Elizabeth Mason, farm owners, and the Saint Thomas Catholic Beneficial Society sold land to the county's Board of Education. A final parcel was purchased from Francis P. and Anne D. Hamilton in 1957. The Board of Education held the land until 1991, when all five parcels were sold to the County Commissioners of Charles County. The 12.76 acres and its associated buildings, with the exception of the Jude House, are leased to Bel Alton High School Alumni Association Community Development Corporation (CDC) by the Charles County Commissioners. The Bel Alton Alumni Association CDC is redeveloping the site to serve as an economic and community development center for low-income residents. As part of this initiative, the exterior of Bel Alton High School has been restored to its original appearance.

The design of the Bel Alton High School is characteristic of Colonial Revival-style schools built in the early and mid-twentieth century. Popular in the United States between 1880 and 1955, the Colonial Revival style resulted from the rebirth of interest in the colonial English and Dutch houses of the eastern seaboard coincident with the Philadelphia Centennial. Stylistic details in Colonial Revival buildings are primarily drawn from the Georgian and Federal styles. While Colonial Revival buildings of the first quarter of the twentieth century reflected their colonial influences more clearly, those constructed after World War II (1941-1945) were simplified, with details suggesting rather than duplicating the original examples.

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<sup>5</sup> Alice Barrows, "Schools," *Public Buildings: Architecture Under the Public Works Administration, 1933-39*, Volume I, (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1986), pp. XVIII-XXII.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.csmd.edu/Library/SMSC/ccschools/schools/listb.htm>

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It is possible the Bel Alton High School is a Public Works Administration (P.W.A.) school building from the 1930s, although no documentation has been located to date to confirm this thesis. Characteristic of P.W.A. schools as well as rural educational facilities constructed nationwide in the second quarter of the twentieth century, Bel Alton High School features a side-gabled roof with projecting front gable bays, window ribbons, and pedimented front gable porticos over the main entrances.

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### Chain of Title:

April 2, 1923:	Lucy A. Gardiner and Thomas R. Gardiner, her husband to The County Board of Education of Charles County PARCEL 1 Land Records of Charles County Liber 40 Folio 415
May 25, 1938:	J. Neal and Mary E. Hamilton to The County Board of Education of Charles County PARCEL 2 Land Records of Charles County Liber 68 Folio 540
May 25, 1938:	The Saint Thomas Catholic Beneficial Society to The County Board of Education of Charles County PARCEL 4 Land Records of Charles County Liber 68 Folio 543
May 27, 1938:	Paul and Elizabeth Mason to The County Board of Education of Charles County PARCEL 3 Land Records of Charles County Liber 68 Folio 542
June 19, 1957:	Francis P. and Anne D. Hamilton to The County Board of Education of Charles County PARCEL 5 Land Records of Charles County Liber 130 Folio 244
January 15, 1991:	Board of Education of Charles County, Maryland to County Commissioners of Charles County, Maryland PARCELS 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 Land Records of Charles County Liber 1529 Folio 526



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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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Alice Freeman Young, Oral History. November 16, 2002. <http://www.csmd.edu/Library/SMSC/ccschools/schools/listb.htm>

Barrows, Alice. *Public Buildings: Architecture Under the Public Works Administration, 1933-39*, Volume I. New York, NY: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1986.

Charles County Land and Will Records. Charles County Courthouse and the Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, Maryland.

Rivoire, J. Richard. *Homeplaces: Traditional Domestic Architecture of Charles County, Maryland*. Crownsville, MD: Maryland Historical Trust, 1990.

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## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of surveyed property	<u>12.76</u>
Acreage of historical setting	<u>12.76</u>
Quadrangle name	<u>La Plata</u>

Quadrangle scale: 1:24,000

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

The property at 9501 Crain Highway (also known as 9505 Crain Highway) is currently designated as Parcel 74, Grid 7 as indicated on Map 64. The Bel Alton High School had been associated with Parcels 73 and 74 since its construction in 1937. However, Parcels 73 and 74 have been combined into one parcel (Parcel 74), changing the property's historical association circa 2000.

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## 11. Form Prepared by

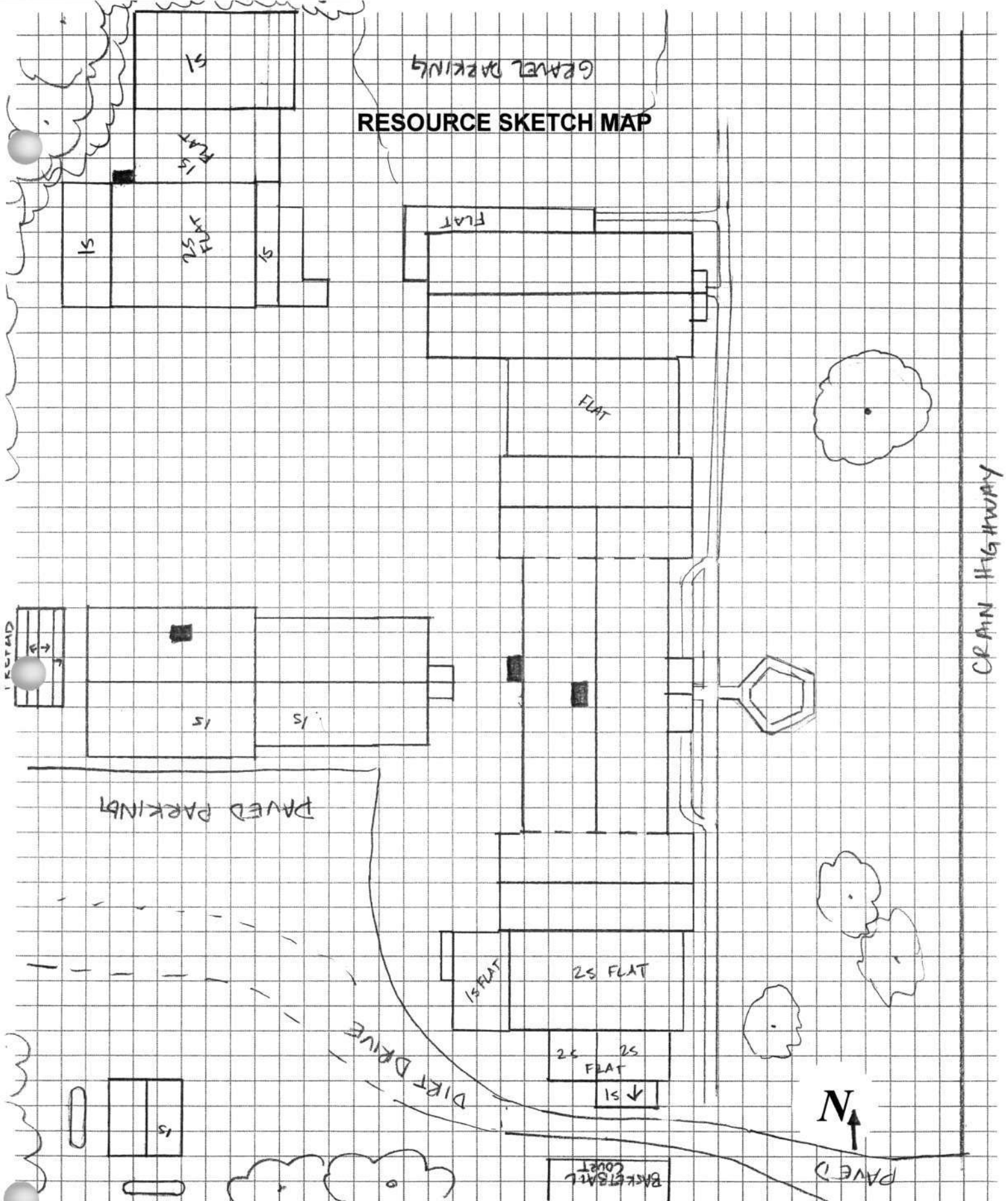
name/title	Elizabeth Breiseth, Architectural Historian		
organization	EHT Tracerics, Inc.	date	October 2006
street & number	1121 Fifth Street, NW	telephone	(202) 393-1199
city or town	Washington	state	D.C.

The Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

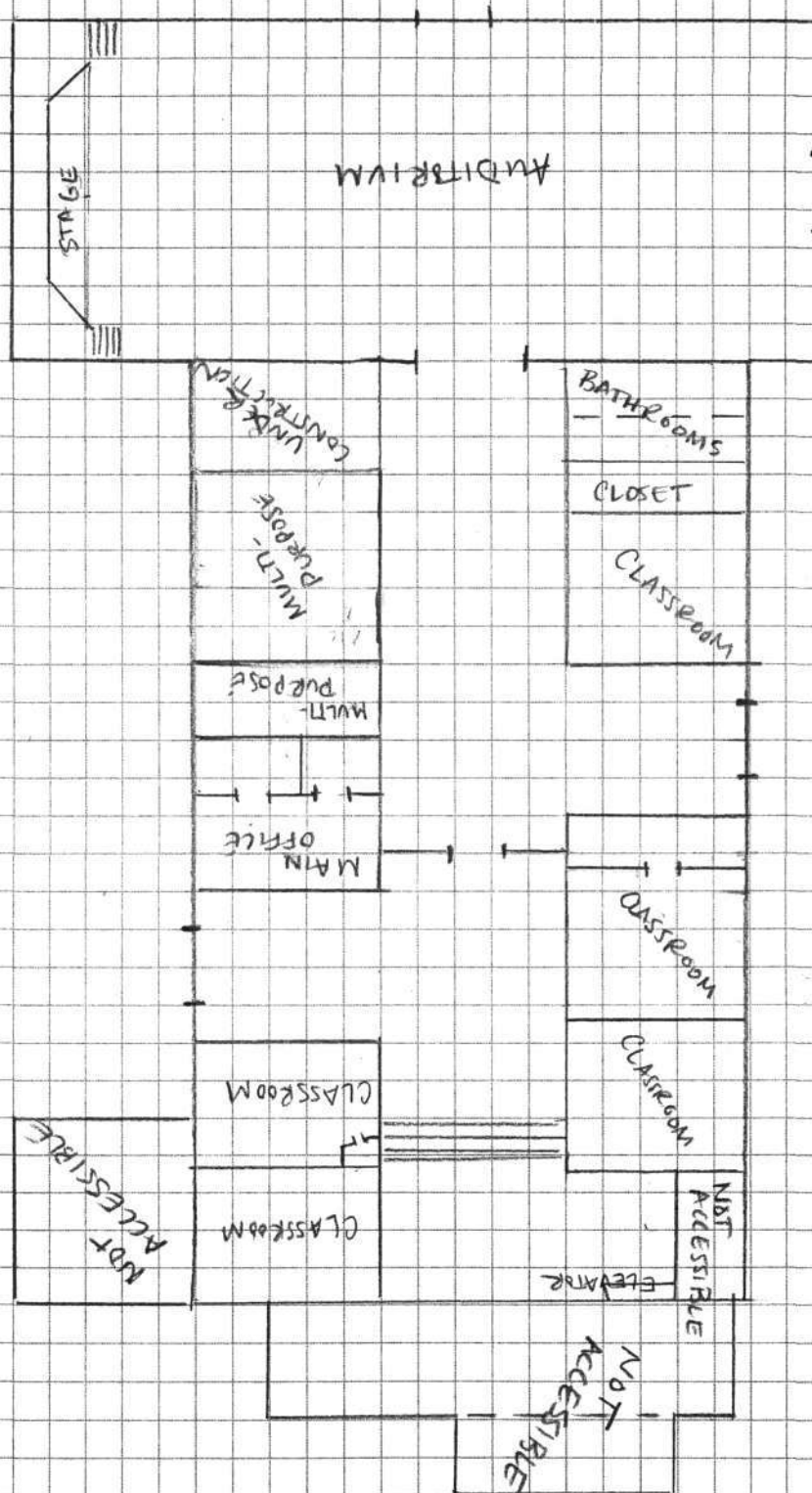
return to: Maryland Historical Trust  
DHCD/DHCP  
100 Community Place  
Crownsville, MD 21032-2023  
410-514-7600

# RESOURCE SKETCH MAP



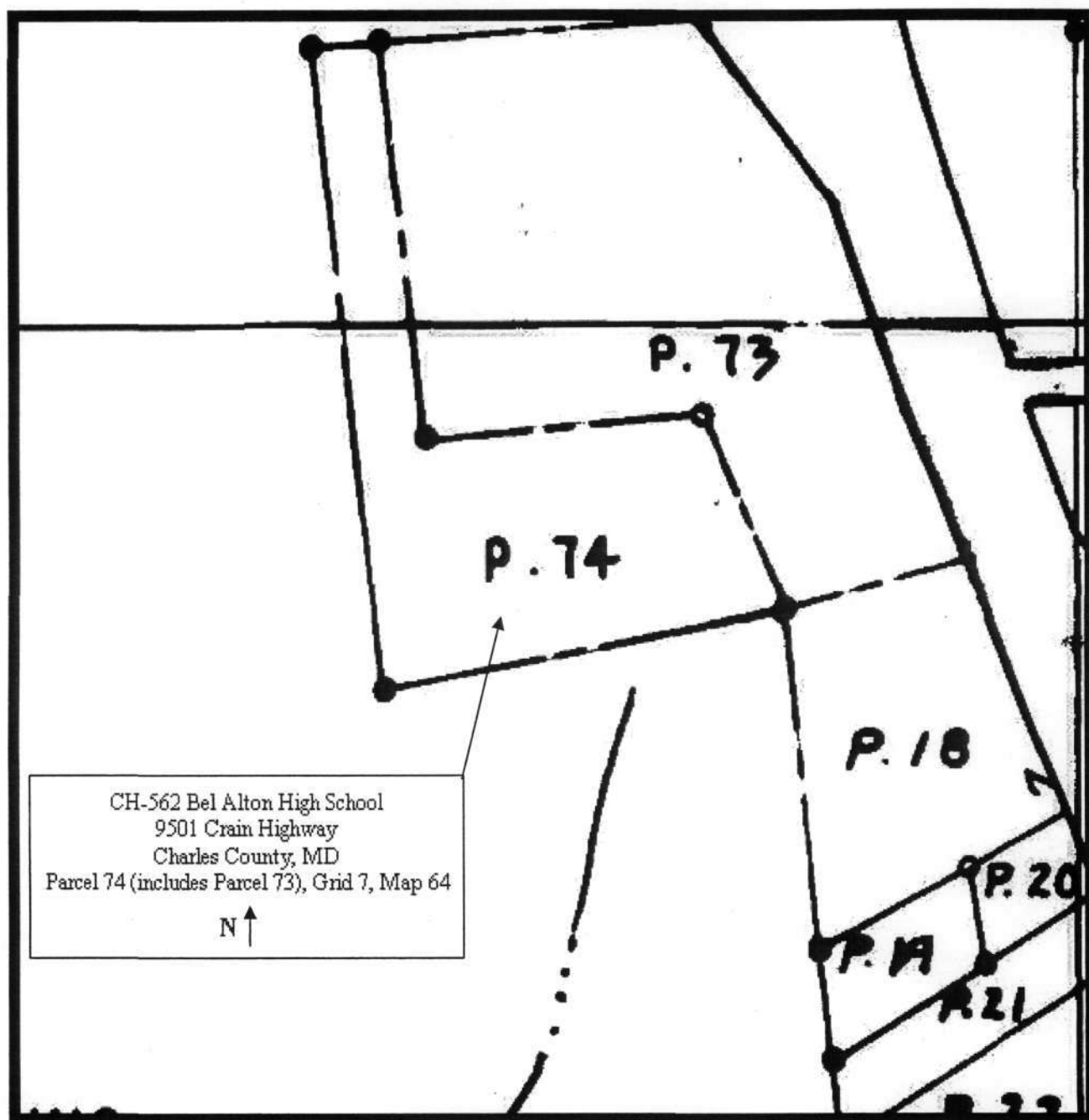
ID#: CH-562 Name: Bel Alton High School, site plan  
 Address: 9301 Crann Highway  
 Town/Town Vicinity: Bel Alton, MD County: Charles

# RESOURCE SKETCH MAP



N ↑

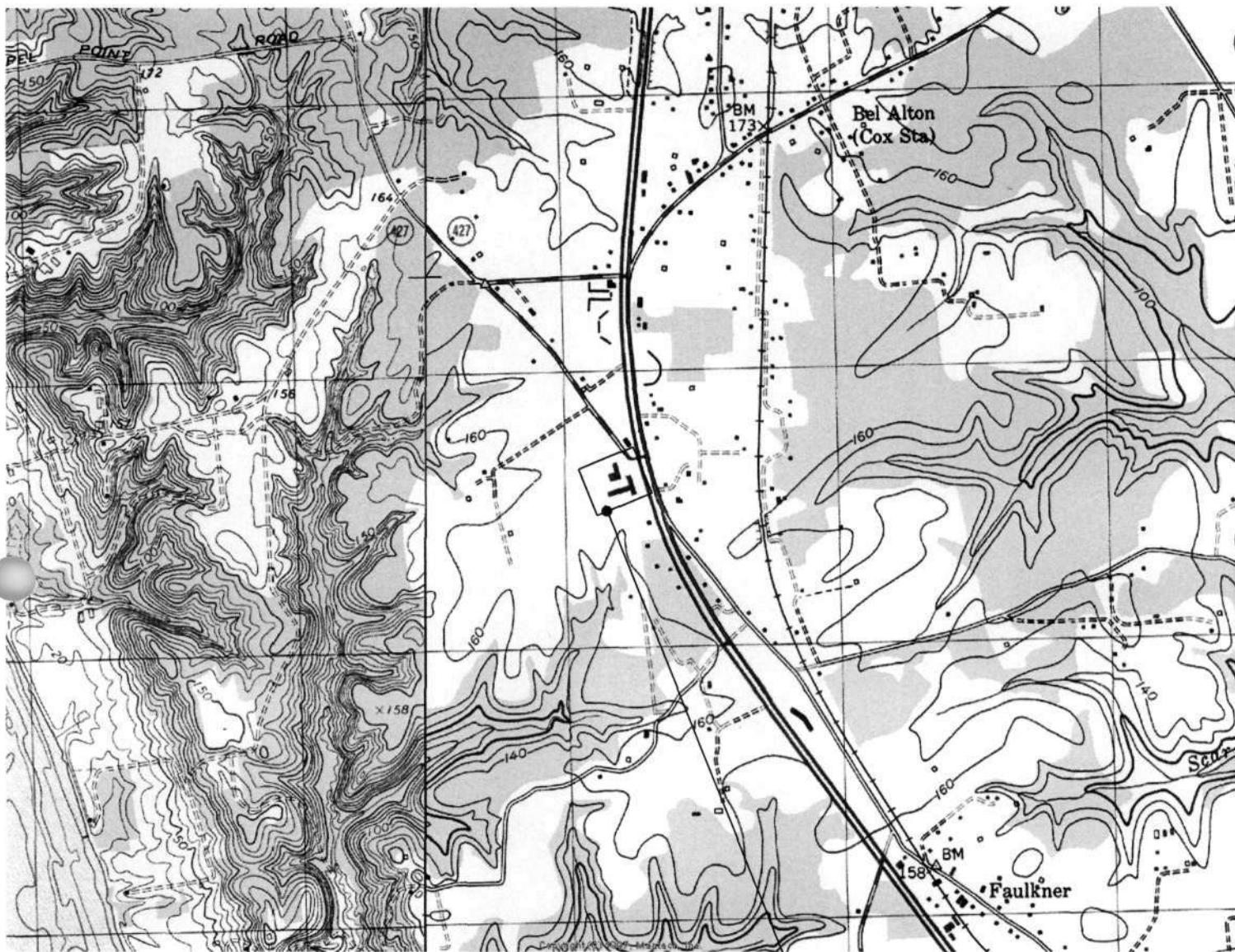
ID#: CH-562 Name: Bel Alton High School, interior  
 Address: 9501 Crain High way  
 Town/Town Vicinity: Bel Alton, MD County: Charles



CH-562 Bel Alton High School  
9501 Crain Highway  
Charles County, MD  
Parcel 74 (includes Parcel 73), Grid 7, Map 64

N ↑





CH-562

9501 Crain Highway (MD-301)  
Charles County, MD: Popes Creek  
Bel Alton, MD  
USGS Map  
EHT Tracerics, Inc., 2006







CH-562

Bel Alton High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Looking Southeast toward the north and west elevations of  
Bel Alton High School



CH-562

Bel Alton High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Looking east toward Bel Alton High School and the  
Jude House.





CH-562

Bel Air High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Looking northwest toward the facade of Jude House.

3 of 20



CH-562

Bel Alton High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Looking Southeast along the rear elevation of  
Bel Alton High School.



CH-562

Bel Alton High School

Charles County, MD

Tracevics

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Looking northwest toward gymnasium.



CH-542

Bel Alton High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Bel Alton High School interior, east wall of auditorium





CH-562

Bel Air High School

Charles County, MD

Traceris

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Bel Air High School interior, west wall of auditorium

70+20



CH-562

Bel Airtan High School

Charles County, MD

Traceyies

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Bel Airtan High School interior corridor, looking west

8 of 20



CH-562

Bel Airtan High School  
Charles Cauty, MD

Traceries  
September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Bel Airtan High School interior corridor, looking south





CH-562

Bel Air High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Bel Air High School classroom interior, east wall

10 of 20



CH-562

Bel Aton High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Bel Aton High School interior, northeast auditorium  
corner



CH-562

Bel Airton High School

Charles County, MD

Traverses

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Looking west at the Bel Airton High School  
auditorium facade

12 of 20





CH-562

Bel Air High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Looking northwest at the agriculture building's  
facade.

13 of 20



CH-562

Bel Alton High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Looking northeast toward gymnasium

14 of 20



CH-562

Bel Airtan High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Looking Southwest toward the rear elevation of  
Jude House

15 of 20



CH-562

Bel Airtan High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Looking northeast along the rear elevation of  
Bel Airtan High School.

16 of 20





CH-562

Bel Air High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Looking southwest toward pump station.

17 of 20



CH-562

Bel Air High School

Charles County, MD

Tracer

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

South elevation of Bel Air High School



CH-562

Bel Air High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Facade, Bel Air High School



CH-562

Bel Alton High School

Charles County, MD

Tracerus

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Looking southwest along Bel Alton High School's  
fence

20 of 20



CAPSULE SUMMARY  
Bel Alton High School (CH: 562)  
9505 Crain Highway  
Charles County, Maryland

Constructed in 1937, the Bel Alton High School served as one of the early high schools in Charles County. It was constructed as the first standard high school for African-Americans in the county. The property on which the school sits was purchased by the Board of Education as five separate parcels of land. The first of these parcels was purchased in 1923 and the three subsequent parcels were all purchased in May 1938. In 1957, the final parcel of land was purchased. Bel Alton High School is one of only two pre-World War II high schools remaining in Charles County.

The high school, now known as the Bel Alton Facility, is located at the crossroads of Crain Highway and Irving Road. The Colonial Revival style school building is two-stories in height and eleven bays in width. Set on a concrete block foundation, the masonry walls are clad in stucco. The main building is currently vacant and the windows have been boarded shut with plywood. Two brick chimneys rise from the asphalt shingle gable roof and a two-story, concrete block addition sits on the southern end of the school. To the rear of the school, there are three additional buildings: another school building, a gymnasium, and a shed.

Inventory No. CH:562

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ Name of Listing \_\_\_\_\_  
No X

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties  
Bel Alton High School  
9505 Crain Highway  
Charles County, Maryland

Inventory No. CH: 562  
Page 2

=====

6. Function or Use

=====

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: EDUCATION

Sub: School

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: GOVERNMENT

Sub: Government Office

=====

7. Description

=====

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Colonial Revival

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation Solid: Concrete Block

Roof Side Gable: Asphalt Shingle

Walls Masonry: Concrete Stucco

other \_\_\_\_\_

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property.)

See Continuation Sheet No. 7-1

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties  
Bel Alton High School  
9505 Crain Highway  
Charles County, Maryland

Inventory No. CH: 562  
Page 3

=====  
8. Statement of Significance  
=====

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or a grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties  
Bel Alton High School  
9505 Crain Highway  
Charles County, Maryland

Inventory No. CH: 562  
Page 4

=====  
Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture  
Ethnicity  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance 1937-1950  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates 1937  
1991  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation Undefined  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder Unknown  
\_\_\_\_\_

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property.)

See Continuation Sheet No. 8-1

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties  
Bel Alton High School  
9505 Crain Highway  
Charles County, Maryland

Inventory No. CH: 562  
Page 5

=====

9. Major Bibliographical References

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(Cite the books, articles, legal records, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Barrows, Alice. *Public Buildings: Architecture Under the Public Works Administration, 1933-39, Volume I.* New York, NY: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1986.

Charles County Land and Will Records. Charles County Courthouse and the Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, Maryland.

Rivoire, J. Richard. *Homeplaces: Traditional Domestic Architecture of Charles County, Maryland.* Crownsville, MD: Maryland Historical Trust, 1990.

=====

10. Geographical Data

=====

Acreage of Property 12.760 acres

**Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)**

The property at 9505 Crain Highway is designated as Parcels 73 and 74, Grid 7 as indicated on Map 64.

**Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)**

The Bel Alton High School at 9505 Crain Highway has been associated with Parcels 73 and 74 since its construction in 1937.

=====

11. Form Prepared By

=====

name/title R. Weidlich and C. Novelli, Architectural Historians  
organization EHT Traceries, Inc. date July 9, 1999  
street & number 5420 Western Avenue telephone 301/656-5283  
city or town Chevy Chase state MD zip code 20815

=====

12. Property Owner

=====

name County Commissioners of Charles County  
street & number P. O. Box B telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town La Plata state MD zip code 20646-0167

=====

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH: 562

Section 7 Page 1

Bel Alton High School  
name of property  
Charles County, Maryland  
county and state

=====

The Bel Alton High School, now known as the Bel Alton Facility, is located at the crossroads of Crain Highway and Irving Road. The level grassy lot has a gravel driveway and scattered mature trees and shrubs. Constructed in 1937, the Colonial Revival style school building is two-stories in height and eleven bays in width. Set on a concrete block foundation, the masonry walls are clad in stucco. The main building is currently vacant and the windows have been boarded shut with plywood. Two brick chimneys rise from the asphalt shingle gable roof and a two-story, concrete block addition sits on the southern end of the school. To the rear of the school, there are three additional buildings: another school building, a gymnasium, and a shed.

**EXTERIOR DESCRIPTION:**

The façade or east elevation of the school is eleven bays wide. The windows are generally grouped together in bands of four or five. In total, there are thirty-four window openings on the façade, all of which have been boarded shut. Some of the windows have rowlock brick sills and the remainder have wood sills and lintels. Front gable bays and porches adorn the façade. There is a one-story, three-bay porch and a one-story, one-bay portico, both with Tuscan columns. An arched brick molding frames the pedimented portico. There are two, double leaf, wood flush doors with lights. Like the windows, the lights in the doors and the transoms above have been boarded shut. The gable ends are defined by semi-circular and circular vents and molded wood cornice returns. Three large, circular vent pipes rise from the ridge of the side gable, asphalt shingle roof. At the southernmost end of the building, there is a two-story, one-bay addition with a flat roof.

A one-story, five-bay porch extends across the north elevation. Metal posts support the metal shed roof of the porch. Behind the porch is a double leaf door opening with a transom, both of which are boarded shut with plywood. Also boarded shut with plywood are three window openings with rowlock sills.

There are twenty-four window openings across the rear or west elevation. Although they have been boarded shut with plywood, the sills and lintels are visible. Some of the windows have rowlock brick sills and the remainder have wood sills and lintels. A double leaf, flush metal door pierces the west elevation. The



MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH: 562

Section 7 Page 2

Bel Alton High School  
name of property  
Charles County, Maryland  
county and state

=====

exterior chimney is laid in six-course American bond and the interior brick chimney, which rises from the rear roof slope, is laid in stretcher bond. A molded wood cornice with returns adorns the front gable bay. The flat roof addition is three bays wide at the rear. Like the other windows, these openings are covered with plywood.

The two-story, four-bay flat roof addition completely obscures the south elevation. It is clad in stucco and the exterior stairway has been enclosed with stucco. The single leaf entry and the first story window openings are boarded shut with plywood. At the second story, there are two window openings that are boarded shut and one window opening with a 4/4 metal window. This is the only window on the building that remains visible. There is also a one-story addition with a flat roof and stucco cladding. Like the rest of the building, the window openings are covered with plywood.

**SUPPORTING BUILDINGS:**

The secondary school building and the gymnasium were constructed in the middle of the twentieth century. The school is one-story in height, one bay in width, and forty-two bays deep. Constructed of concrete block, the building has double leaf wood panel-and-light doors and 1/1 aluminum windows. Square, wood posts support the one-story, one-bay front gable porch. A front gable, asphalt shingle roof covers the school.

The gymnasium is one-story in height and fourteen bays wide. Constructed of concrete block, the building contains three roll-up garage doors and a one-story, seven-bay porch with metal posts. A central brick chimney rises from the flat roof. At the rear of the secondary classroom building, there is a 1980s era shed. One-story in height and one bay in width, the shed is clad in vinyl siding and is covered by a front gambrel, asphalt shingle roof.



MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH: 562

Section 8 Page 1

Bel Alton High School  
name of property  
Charles County, Maryland  
county and state

=====

Constructed in 1937, the Bel Alton High School served as one of the early high schools in Charles County. It was constructed as the first standard high school for African-Americans in the county. The property on which the school sits was purchased by the Charles County Board of Education as five separate parcels of land. The first of these parcels was purchased in 1923 and the three subsequent parcels were all purchased in May 1938. In 1957, the final parcel of land was purchased. Bel Alton High School is one of only two pre-World War II high schools remaining in Charles County.

In the years following the Civil War, newly freed African-Americans bonded together in close-knit communities tied together by social support networks such as churches, schools, and fraternal/social associations. The education of former slaves and their children formed an important element of these early African-American communities. Philanthropic organizations and the Freedmen's Bureau often assisted in the establishment of grade and technical schools by providing funds and materials for the construction of buildings. These buildings often served as churches as well as schools, and functioned as focal points for growing African-American communities. Beginning in 1917, the Rosenwald Fund was a source of financial assistance to African-American communities who sought to build their own schools. The churches and schools were often constructed on lands tenanted to African-American farmers by white landowners.

The Bel Alton School is characteristic of the Colonial Revival style schools built in the early and mid-twentieth century. Popular in the United States between 1880 and 1955, the Colonial Revival style resulted from the rebirth of interest in the colonial English and Dutch houses of the eastern seaboard coincident with the Philadelphia Centennial. Stylistic details in Colonial Revival domestic buildings were drawn primarily from the Georgian and Federal styles. While Colonial Revival buildings of the first quarter of the twentieth century reflected their colonial influences more clearly, those that were constructed after World War II were more simplified, with details that suggested rather than duplicated the original examples. The Bel Alton High School is possibly a Public Works Administration (P.W.A.) school building from the 1930s. Like other P.W.A. schools, it features a side gable roof with projecting front gable bays, bands of windows, and pedimented front gable porticos and porches over the main

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH: 562

Section 8 Page 2

Bel Alton High School  
name of property  
Charles County, Maryland  
county and state

=====  
entrances.

During the Great Depression, there was a lull in construction of school buildings throughout the United States. However, between 1934 to 1938, the Public Works Administration made grants and loans for school building amounting to \$113,155,766 per year. During this period, 1,965 school buildings were constructed throughout the Continental United States. Nearly two-thirds of these schools were erected in suburban and rural areas. The first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw large-scale school district consolidations all across the country, which was brought on by the advent of improved roads and school buses. Aid received from the P.W.A. also improved the types of educational facilities that were erected. The new schools provided classroom space for subjects such as science, art, music, and work shop and the facilities often included auditoriums and/or gymnasiums and libraries.<sup>1</sup>

National Register Evaluation:

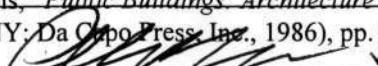
The Bel Alton High School is eligible due to the fact that it meets National Register Criteria A and C. Preliminary research has revealed an association between the building and events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history (Criterion A), as well as an association with the architecture of the PWA. The property, however, does not have any association with lives of persons significant in our past (Criterion B). There is no evidence that the property is likely to yield information important in history or prehistory (Criterion D). Thus, the property is National Register-eligible.

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST

Eligibility recommended

 Not Recommended

Comments:

<sup>1</sup> Alice Barrows, "Schools," *Public Buildings: Architecture Under the Public Works Administration 1933-39*, Volume I, (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1986), pp. XVIII-XXII.  
Review, OPS:  Date: 11/4/99

Reviewer, NR Program: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH: 562

Bel Alton High School  
name of property  
Charles County, Maryland  
county and state

=====

**HISTORIC CONTEXT:**

**Geographic Organization:** Western Shore

**Chronological/Development Period (s):**

Modern Period (1930-present)

**Prehistoric/Historic Period Theme (s):**

Architecture, Landscape, and  
Community Planning  
Education

**RESOURCE TYPE(S)**

**Category:** Building

**Historic Environment:** Rural

**Historic Function (s):** EDUCATION/School

**Known Design Source:** Unknown

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH:562

Bel Alton High School  
name of property  
Charles County, Maryland  
county and state

=====  
**Chain of Title:**

April 2, 1923: Lucy A. Gardiner and Thomas R. Gardiner, her  
husband to The County Board of Education of  
Charles County  
PARCEL 1  
Land Records of Charles County  
Liber 40 Folio 415

May 25, 1938: J. Neal and Mary E. Hamilton to The County  
Board of Education of Charles County  
PARCEL 2  
Land Records of Charles County  
Liber 68 Folio 540

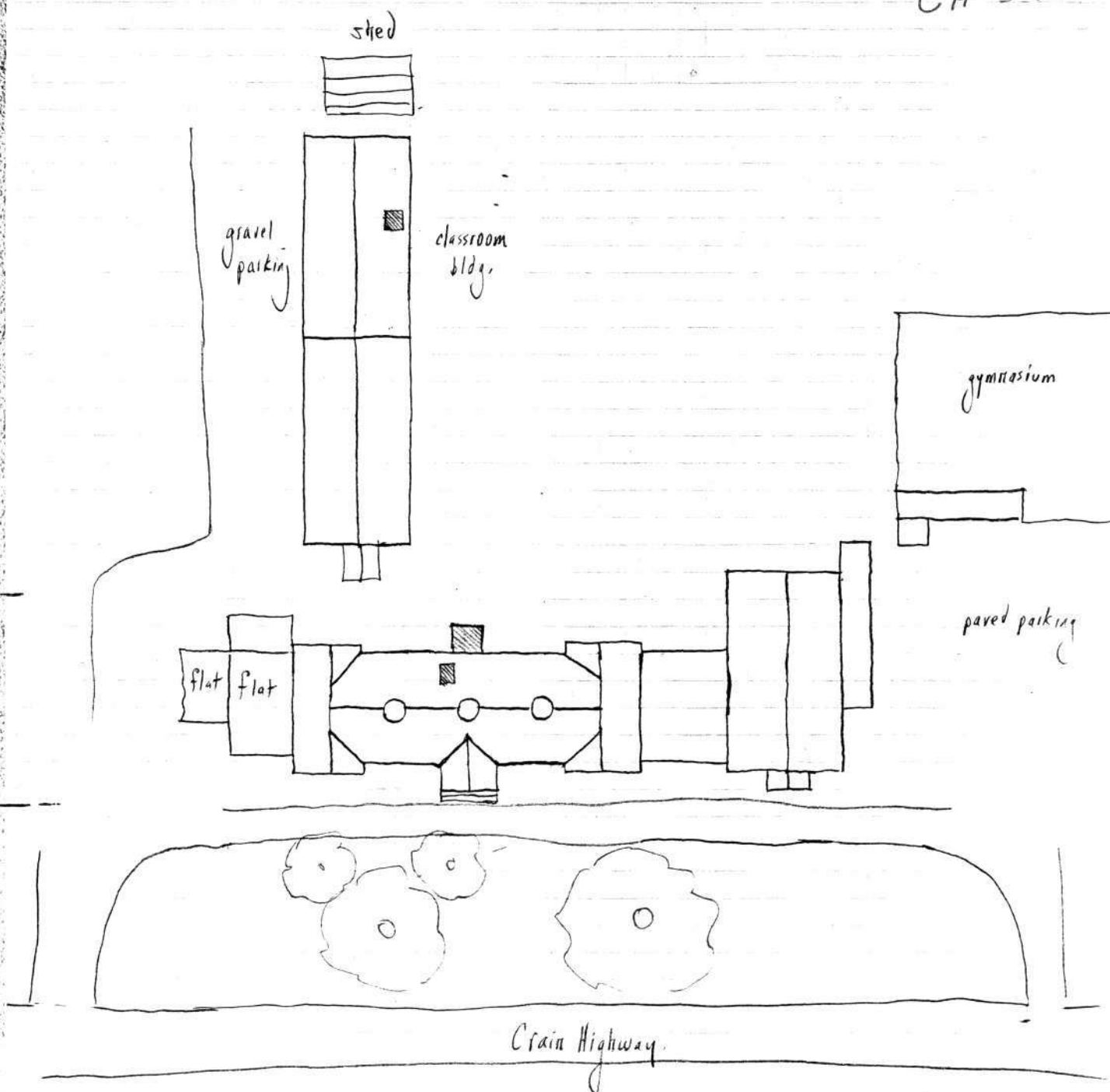
May 27, 1938: Paul and Elizabeth Mason to The County Board of  
Education of Charles County  
PARCEL 3  
Land Records of Charles County  
Liber 68 Folio 542

May 25, 1938: The Saint Thomas Catholic Beneficial Society to  
The County Board of Education of Charles  
County  
PARCEL 4  
Land Records of Charles County  
Liber 68 Folio 543

June 19, 1957: Francis P. and Anne D. Hamilton to The County  
Board of Education of Charles County  
PARCEL 5  
Land Records of Charles County  
Liber 130 Folio 244

January 15, 1991: Board of Education of Charles County, Maryland  
to County Commissioners of Charles County,  
Maryland  
PARCELS 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5  
Land Records of Charles County  
Liber 1529 Folio 526

CH-562



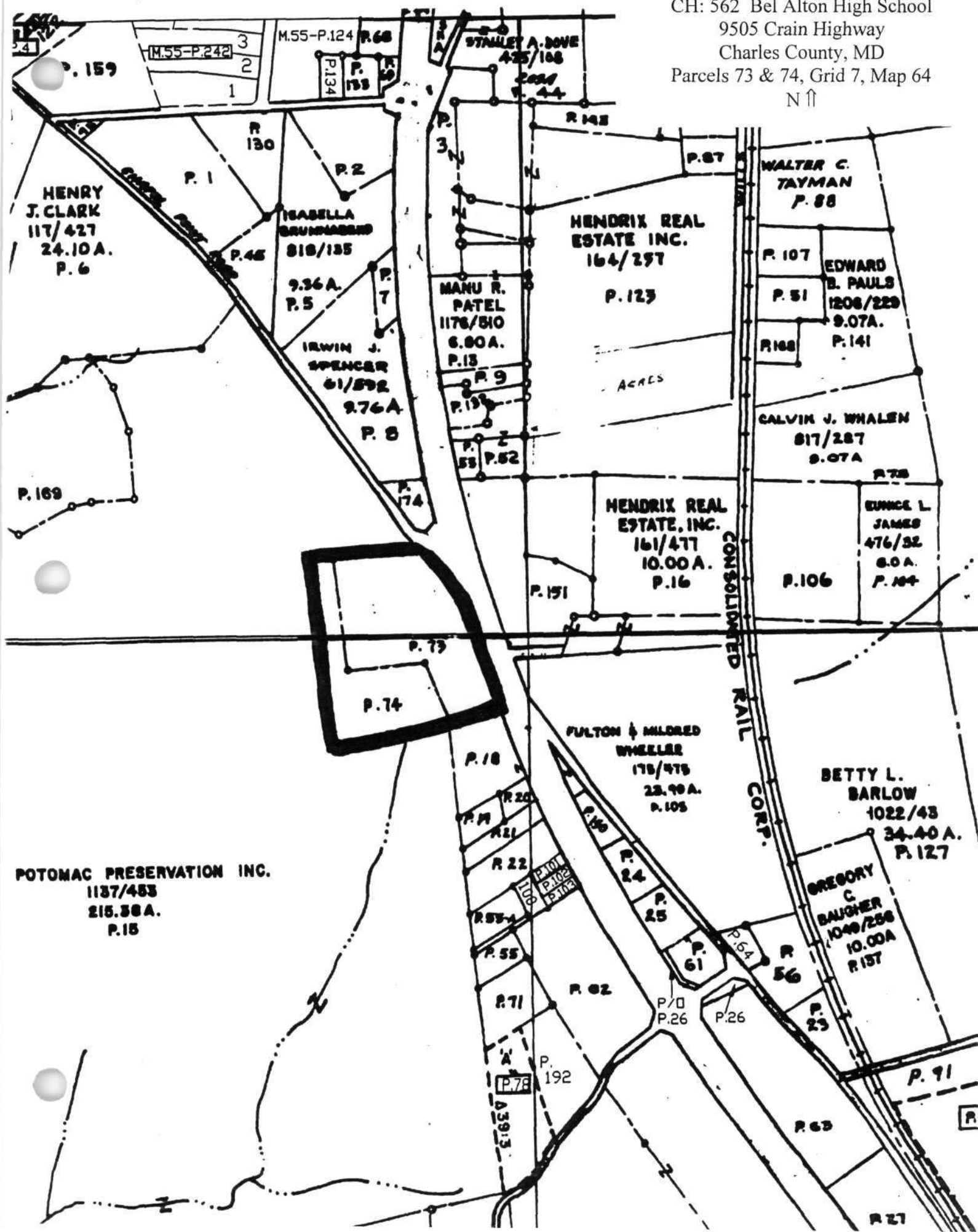
Bell Alton High School CH: 562  
9505 Crain Highway

Charles County  
Maryland

Resource Sketch Map 1999  
Not Drawn to Scale

N →

CH: 562 Bel Alton High School  
9505 Crain Highway  
Charles County, MD  
Parcels 73 & 74, Grid 7, Map 64  
N ↑↑





CHARLES COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS  
CH-559

BEL ALTON SURVEY DISTRICT  
CH-560

9030 CRAIN HIGHWAY  
CH-565

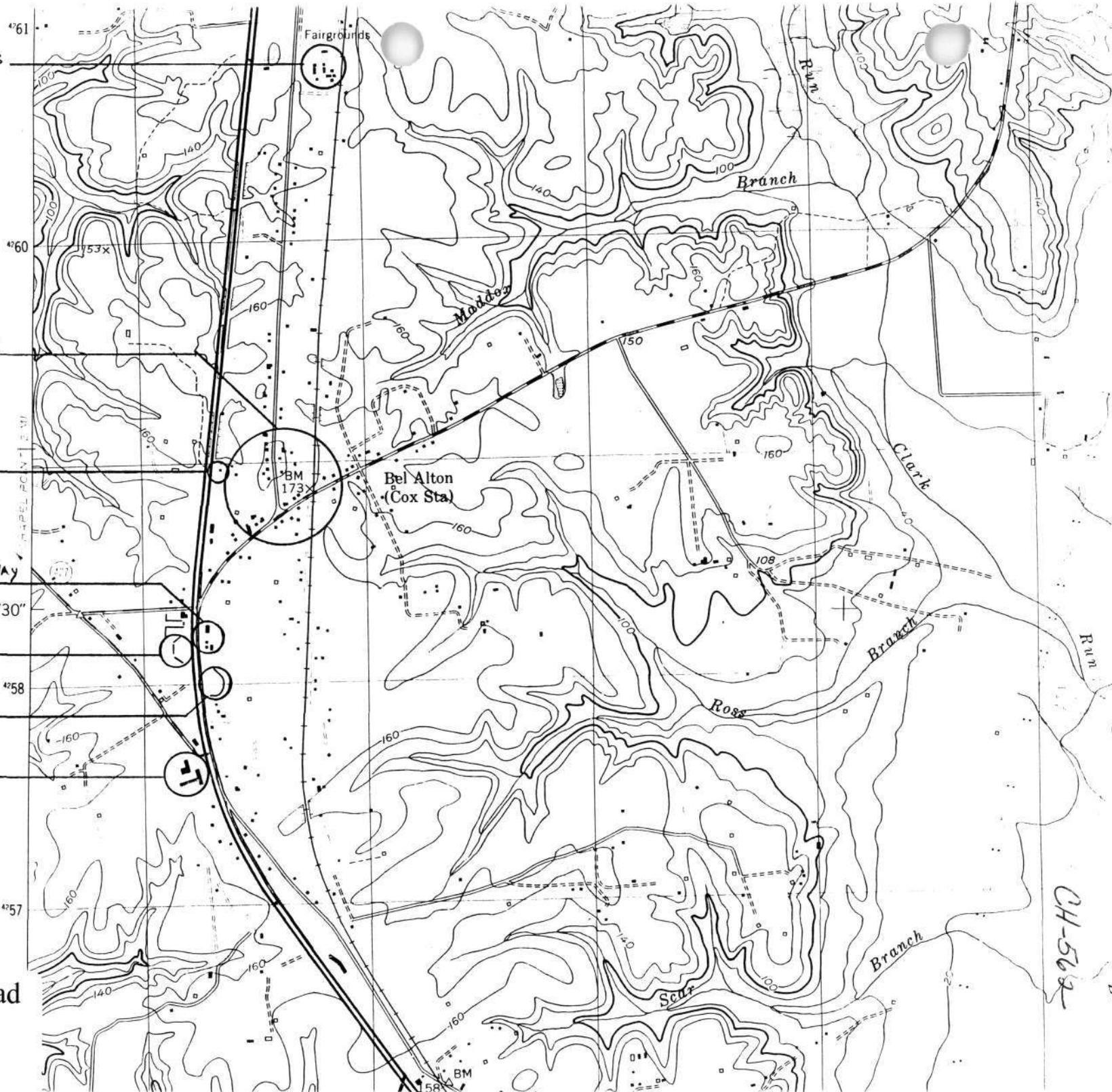
SERVICE STATION, CRAIN HIGHWAY  
CH-563

9295 CRAIN HIGHWAY  
CH-566

MOTEL, CRAIN HIGHWAY  
CH-561

BEL ALTON HIGH SCHOOL  
CH-562

Pope's Creek USGS Quad



CH-562





CH:562

BELL ALLEN HIGH SCHOOL

9505 CRAIN HIGHWAY

CHARLES COUNTY, MD

TRACERIES

JUNE 1999

MD SHPD

east elevation

1 of 6



CH:562

BELL ALTON HIGH SCHOOL  
9505 CRAIN HIGHWAY  
CHARLES COUNTY, MD  
TRACERIES  
JUNE 1999  
MD SHPO

northeast corner

2 of 6



CH:562

BELL ALTON HIGH SCHOOL  
9505 CRAIN HIGHWAY  
CHARLES COUNTY, MD

TRACERIES

JUNE 1999

MD SHPO

South elevation

4 of 6



CH:562

BELL ALTON HIGH SCHOOL  
9905 CRAIN HIGHWAY  
CHARLES COUNTY, MD  
TRACERIES  
JUNE 1999  
MD SATPO

west elevation

3 of 6





CH:562

BELL ALTON HIGH SCHOOL  
9505 CRAIN HIGHWAY  
CHARLES COUNTY, MD  
TRACERIES  
JUNE 1999  
MD SHPO

classroom building, south elevation  
6 of 6



CH:502

BELL ALTON HIGH SCHOOL  
9505 CRAIN HIGHWAY  
CHARLES COUNTY, MD

TRACERIES

JUNE 1999

MD SHPD

gymnasium, southeast corner

5 of 6



CH:562

BELL ALTON HIGH SCHOOL  
9505 CRAIN HIGHWAY  
CHARLES COUNTY, MD  
TRACERIES  
JUNE 1999  
MD SHPO

classroom building, south elevation

6 of 6

(